

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

CONTRACEPTION

Stopes, Marie Carmichael, D.Sc., Ph.D.
Roman Catholic Methods of Birth Control. London, 1933. Peter Davies. Pp. xv + 235. Price 6s.

MORE than four centuries have elapsed since the dominion of the Roman Catholic Church was overthrown in England; and in this long interval, with our insular detachment from Continental troubles, we have forgotten what that domination was like. By its conquests in the domains of astronomy, physics, geology, and biology, Science has inflicted such crushing blows on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church that we have become contemptuously tolerant of it as a spent force, and removed all restrictions on it in accordance with our general principle of religious liberty. But in many other countries Roman Catholicism has remained the dominant religion, and constant struggles have arisen between it and the secular powers, until one after another has been forced to take drastic steps to curb its interference, and only one country—the Irish Free State—now probably remains in subjection to it. As a reward, and assisted by recent political events, the Roman Catholic Church has tightened its grip upon Ireland, and now appears to be using it as a base of operations for extending its influence in this country, which has become an easy prey through its forgetfulness and principle of religious toleration.

Toleration is one of the greatest of national virtues, but it at least implies reciprocal tolerance, and all religious bodies recognize it and act accordingly—except the Church of Rome. In spite of the complete overthrow of her pretensions to authority in the domain of physical science, she had the effrontery as recently as 1871 to proclaim the doctrine of Papal infallibility, and to claim the right to sit in judgment not only on her own followers, but on all others. Foiled as she has constantly been in her encounters with Science

and rulers, she has taken refuge in the last and greatest stronghold of ignorance and superstition—the domain of sex. Armed with various self-invented dogmas for which no warrant can be found in the Scriptures, she asserts that she is the divinely appointed guardian of sex-morality, before which Science and law must bow. As these dogmas include the right of all married people to procreate without restraint, regardless of their quality, eugenists must recognize that the Roman Catholic Church is their avowed and implacable enemy, and that there is no hope of securing any practical result from their teachings if the power of that Church is not finally broken. In view of the relatively small number of Roman Catholics in this country, it seems difficult to believe that their power can be great; but those who are old enough to remember the immense power of obstruction which the small Irish party of only about 40 members wielded in our House of Commons a few decades ago, in virtue of their solidarity, will recognize the strength of a small minority who will vote in complete subservience to leaders who are destitute of any scruples concerning the means to attain their ends.

Dr. Stopes has rendered a great service by revealing one important aspect of the activities of the Roman Catholic Church; and all eugenists who are anxious to see some practical outcome of their doctrines will be well advised to read this book attentively in order to realize what they have to face. Its key-note is given by Dr. Dearmer, Canon of Westminster, in his introduction, as follows:

“Slowly and reluctantly I have been forced to the conclusion that the Roman Catholic Church is not so much a religious community as a great political machine, endeavouring to control our newspapers and other sources of information and to acquire a dominating position, through a small but highly-organized minority vote, over the affairs of Great Britain. . . . It is not possible any longer to doubt that an

attempt is being made, through immigration from Southern Ireland, gradually to drive the English out of England and the Scots out of Scotland."

Those of us who have been concerned with the birth-control movement have been forced to this conclusion for several years past; and it appears that the Roman Catholic Church has been studying eugenics to good purpose, and has realized that since it can no longer hope to regain its influence by conversion, it can do so by breeding Roman Catholics at the expense of non-Catholics. If it can only keep its adherents from adopting birth control, and ensure the support of their numerous progeny by public assistance, while the rest of us restrict our families the more in order to provide the necessary taxation for their support, a few generations will see the present minority of Catholics converted into a majority, and the great goal of the Roman Catholic conquest of Britain will be attained without any open conflict.

If the Roman Catholic Church could rely on the complete subservience of her own adherents, it would only be necessary to forbid them to practise birth control, and leave the rest of us to do so without protest or hindrance. But ever since 1841 when the French Bishop Bouvier was forced to appeal to Rome, as it had been found that interrogation and admonition on birth control was leading to refusal of the men to attend confession, the Catholic Church has had to recognize that she cannot count on implicit obedience in this matter; and the recent rapid fall of the birth rate among the Roman Catholics in nearly every country but Ireland clearly shows that they are anxious to follow the non-Catholic example. She can therefore only count on the obedience of the ignorant Irish Catholics, and not even on them if birth-control knowledge penetrates to them. Hence she can only hope to succeed by the most drastic general restriction of such information, which she imposed on the Irish Free State by the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929, which prohibited the publication or selling of any literature which even

advocates birth control. This, of course, put a ban on any British newspapers or books which refer to the subject, and the effect of this ban on our newspapers with their keen rivalry for circulation can be imagined. Dr. Stopes gives instances of the suppression to which this has led, and it is quite evident that if it is unchecked, all discussion of eugenic subjects will be completely muzzled. It has extended even to the medical press, and to some official publications since Dr. Stopes published some official figures which showed that the criminality rate among Roman Catholics is about double that of the remainder of the community.

Emboldened by their success in these directions, Dr. Stopes shows that the Roman Catholics have become openly aggressive, especially in connection with the Ministry of Health's memorandum of 1930, which gave permission to local authorities to provide contraceptive advice at maternity centres, on medical grounds. Since then many town councils have passed resolutions urging the application of this concession, only to be met with abuse from Roman Catholics, culminating in one case, at Bootle, in a demand for a public apology from the councillors who had voted for the resolution, and in another case to its rescission. Organized Roman Catholic opposition has also been concentrated on the Committee on Maternal Welfare of the League of Nations, which issued a report in October 1932 in which it was stated that contraceptive information should be given to women suffering from tuberculosis, heart disease, or nephritis, and that such information should be available at health centres. According to the *Tablet* the report went so far as to recommend the fitting up of motor lorries to give birth-control information in villages. Strong representations were made by various Roman Catholic organizations, and since the Committee refused to modify their report, it was rejected. They are now proclaiming that the whole weight of Roman Catholic opposition will be brought to bear against parliamentary or municipal candidates who are not opposed to birth control, and the effect of this needs no stressing.

Fortunately, the great opportunity given

by the formation of the Irish Free State did not present itself, until the Roman Catholic Church had felt obliged to make so many concessions to the demand for birth control as to render her position so illogical and ridiculous as to be easily vulnerable. Had she maintained the dogma that all attempts at restricting procreation within marriage were mortal sins, on the ground that it is never permissible to attempt to prevent the birth of a child for the glorification of the Creator and the possibility of its eternal bliss, she would have been in a strong position, which could only be combated by secularism. But she has long since renounced that dogma, and made so many concessions to birth control that Dr. Stopes is fully justified in her title. At the National Birth Rate Commission of 1931 the Roman Catholic representative stated that birth control within marriage was allowable (even for economic motives) either by abstention from intercourse or by limiting it to the *tempus ageneos* or "safe period," the latter of which concedes the all-important ethical principle that married persons are justified in enjoying intercourse while intending to escape from its results. *Coitus interruptus* is banned on account of the Story of Onan, and all chemical and mechanical contraceptives as being "Onanistic"; but *coitus reservatus* or intercourse without orgasm is permissible, even if it should result in a subsequent unpremeditated external emission. The dividing line between this and *coitus interruptus*, especially in view of the previous concessions, is too fine for a layman to understand. But although the Roman Catholic Church has made these concessions, apparently for the purpose of retaining the allegiance of her more educated and independent adherents, there can be no doubt that she wishes to keep them from the ignorant, as is illustrated by Dr. Stopes's experience when she referred to *coitus reservatus* by a more generally known title, and was immediately vilified for advocating obscenity.

Another concession, which Dr. Stopes does not mention, was made in 1922, and reduces Roman Catholic sex-morality to the level of

a cynical farce. In the *Dublin Review* for January-March of that year an article appeared under the title "The Church and Prostitution," referring to a pronouncement by the Rev. Father Vermeesch, S.J., Professor of Moral Theology at Rome, in a book *De Castitate*. This pronouncement permits the employment of chemical antiseptic ointments by men before or after indulging in extra-marital intercourse, in order to avoid contracting venereal disease; and the recommendation of such prophylactics to men who intend to so indulge. To the question whether such conduct is not a sin, the answer was given that "the intention of committing fornication is evil, since it is always evil to sin or wish to sin; but the evil is not in sinning and at the same time to seek means, morally indifferent in themselves, for evading the evil consequences of sinning." Hence we are told that chemical ointments which are forbidden for birth control, are "morally indifferent in themselves," when used for prophylaxis! It is the intention, not the means, which is the vital moral point; and since the Roman Catholic Church has admitted the justification for seeking to avoid parenthood in certain cases, why are not the same means morally indifferent?

The obvious effect of this concession is to remove one of the most powerful deterrents to promiscuity, and since married women are enjoined to make every effort to keep their husbands to the narrow frigid limitations permitted by Rome if conception is to be avoided, it simply means exposing the husbands to greater temptation. A husband who yields to such temptation may then use a chemical ointment to protect himself from contagion (and thereby introduce that ointment into his illicit partner); but should he become infected, his wife may not use a chemical contraceptive to avoid having a venereally infected child. Great is the power of the Roman Catholic Church over its meek womanhood, but this is surely going beyond even their subservience, if they were only aware of this concession and its implications. It was published, of course, in Latin.

Some eugenists are more interested in sterilization than in birth control, and to them the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to the latter may appear of little importance; but they must realize that Rome has made no concessions whatever to any proposal for sterilization or for interference with procreation by any external authority. According to the Roman Catholic evidence at our National Birth Rate Commission, the State cannot lawfully forbid the marriage of the poor or the physically or mentally defective. Sterilization is absolutely forbidden, and even segregation for the purpose of preventing marriage. It is quite clear, therefore, that Rome is fundamentally and inexorably opposed to eugenics, and that she will employ the above and any other means to suppress any attempts at eugenic reform.

Once more, therefore, the age-long struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and Science has recommenced; and the task is now laid on the eugenics and birth-control movements to settle it finally. Some of us have seen for a long time past that this struggle would inevitably come, and that birth control would be the liberator, as we had abundant evidence that maternal solicitude was more powerful than superstition; but the Catholic Church has now made a direct attack not only upon birth control and eugenics, but upon our rights of free judgment and discussion, and every British citizen worthy of the name must join in repelling it. Anyone who reads Dr. Stopes's book will be convinced, like Dr. Dearmer, that the matter is too serious for hesitation or delay.

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MAN AND HIS PLANET

Van Loon, Hendrik Willem. *The Home of Mankind*. London, 1933. Harrap. Pp. 506. Price 12s. 6d.

MR. H. G. WELLS'S *Outline of History* has been a prolific parent. That book demonstrated incidentally that there is a very large market awaiting writers who can

present some of the results of the enormous amount of research work in the humane sciences which has been done in recent years in a form intelligible to the average reader, to whom the technicalities of the specialist research worker are almost incomprehensible.

Mr. Van Loon is a follower of Mr. Wells, at a very respectful distance, in this field of work. In 1921 he issued a popular history, *The Story of Mankind*, and the success of that book has led to the production of this popular geography. The author is a journalist; and he does not seem to be handicapped by a serious knowledge of geography as it is studied in our universities to-day. He appears to be much more anxious to make a vivid impression, by picturesque phrase and illustration, than to give careful and accurate statements of fact. A reader who has any specialized knowledge of some of the many matters with which the author deals so fluently, will find errors of statement and of emphasis, of omission and of commission, on almost every page. Yet the general plan is good; and in spite of his journalese and his many errors the author has succeeded in presenting a series of vivid impressionistic studies of many of the important regions of the world, grouped round the one topic of Man's occupation of this planet.

Perhaps the most outstanding weakness is that he appears to undervalue the effects of climate on human development; as when in the brief chapter on the Philippines he implies that the difference of outlook between the citizens of the U.S.A. and the Filipinos is only that between Protestant and Catholic—ignoring that between a people of the temperate zone and dwellers within the tropics. His frequent asides on the growth and spread of population ignore such facts as the widespread decline in the birth rate and the very great differences in the population-capacities of such lands as the United States and Australia; while the forecasts are based rather on the rule-of-three than on a study of existing facts.

As a human geography the book is stimulating, erratic, and unreliable. As a piece of propaganda for the view (p. 22) that "We